



### A Network of Leaders Promoting the Stewardship of Latin America's Coasts



EcoCostas is a network of professionals working to achieve more sustainable forms of coastal and marine development and conservation in Latin America. Its members are leading long-term programs addressing societal and environmental governance issues at sites extending from Patagonia to Mexico.

Those who came together to form the EcoCostas Foundation in 1997 saw a region with an abundance of short-term projects and a scarcity of sustained programs. Initiatives with similar aspirations operated in isolation, unaware of others working on similar issues and challenges. They saw much re-inventing of the wheel and too little dissemination of hard-won lessons learned. At their first regional assembly in 2004 the members of EcoCostas drafted the Guayaquil Declaration that recognized that:

- Transforming societal values and behavior requires strong leadership rooted in the place.
- A lack of capacity is the primary factor limiting progress in ecosystem governance.
- Success requires a sustained commitment to a place and its people; it cannot be achieved during the life of the typical 4–8 year “project”.
- It is most effective to take action *before* an ecosystem is severely degraded.
- Coastal stewardship must be practiced at the community, province and national levels; but local successes can produce tangible results quickly and inspire others.
- Much has been learned and must be disseminated through peer-to-peer relations and by inserting coastal governance concepts and tools into current educational programs.

Since then EcoCostas has worked to create the basis for collaborative learning and action through the preparation of detailed governance baselines that document the long term trajectory of change and the responses – or lack of responses – of past and existing governance system to such changes in the coastal ecosystems in which each member is working. This work has been supported by the Costa Rica based AVINA foundation, USAID and LOICZ. In collaboration with the Coastal Resources Center at the University of Rhode Island a certification program is being designed for practitioners that is based on a Code of Conduct and a set of competencies for the practice of special area coastal governance. The certification program and associated training and will be operational by the end of 2008.

The EcoCostas web page ([www.ecocostas.org](http://www.ecocostas.org)) features a knowledge management system (KMS) that will make accessible the wealth of materials assemble through the process of assembling governance baselines for the sites where each of its members are operating. The KMS is designed as a layered system that provides summary information at the top layer and permits users to drill down to increasing levels of detail. It enables various technical and non-technical staff to create, edit, manage and finally publish a variety of content (such as text, graphics, video, documents etc),

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governed by a centralized set of rules, process and workflows that ensure coherent, validated electronic content.

### **Examples of What EcoCostas Members Are Doing**

#### ***In The Gulf of California***

Gaston Luken and Alejandro Robles, as President and Executive Director of Nor Oeste Sustentable, are working to negotiate long-term goals for selected areas of the Gulf and its watersheds. Their approach features negotiating agreements that draw together leaders from government, business and civil society. In 2006, Luken and Robles facilitated a historic commitment by the shrimp trawler fleets to adopt practices that will reverse decades of chronic over-fishing and conflicts with the conservation community.

#### ***In Nicaragua***

In the Estero Real, a largely intact estuary system with rich mangrove forests on Nicaragua's Pacific coast, Agnes Saborio has led a dedicated group of community leaders and scientists in a twenty-year effort to achieve and sustain shrimp farming that is socially and environmentally responsible. This is an ecosystem of remarkable contrasts. Communities live in abject poverty and barely eke out a living, while beside them lie expanses of industrialized agriculture and prosperous shrimp farms. Agnes and her team are helping chart a course to a more just and sustainable future for the coastal peoples who live and work in this richly endowed but conflict-torn corner of Nicaragua.

#### ***In Ecuador***

Emilio Ochoa and Rafael Elao have been working to organize coastal communities around livelihoods that sustain and restore the goods and services that flow from healthy estuaries and watersheds. Coastal Ecuador's sequence of boom-bust cycles has degraded unusually diverse and productive coastal ecosystem. Progress towards sound governance requires linking community-based initiatives with governmental policies and emerging markets for responsibly produced seafood.

#### ***In Chile***

Max Bello, Caduzzi Salas and a small dedicated team are working to create a blue whale sanctuary in the Chiloe fjord region where salmon aquaculture and a diversity of fisheries are producing major stresses on a beautiful and highly productive ecosystem. Here the complex tangle of issues includes resolution of conflicts between artisanal and industrial fisheries, the siting of salmon farms, the rights of indigenous people and a growing tourism industry.

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### *In Argentinean Patagonia*

Guille Caille and Jose Maria Musmeci have been working for more than a decade to organize a management scheme that links across four provinces to create a network of protected areas and associated artisanal fisheries management and coastal development plans. They face a wide diversity of problems and opportunities ranging from responses to oil spills, encroachment of commercial fisheries into nearshore grounds, the growth of urban areas and solid waste management.

### *In Cuba*

Pedro Alcolado is one of the leaders of a multi-disciplinary team of scientists, resource managers and investors in tourism that has succeeded in launching a management program for the Sabana-Camaguey Archipelago and its watershed. This effort is supported by the Global Environmental Facility. It has restored lagoons damaged by the construction of causeways, re-oriented where and how tourism facilities are sited and operate and reduced the flow of wastes from sugar cane plantations in the watershed. This largely pristine coast of northwest Cuba is an important source of coral, fish and lobster larvae that sustain coral reefs in nearby southern Florida.

Stephen Olsen, LOICZ SSC Member and Topic Leader of Priority Topic 3  
[http://www.loicz.org/about\\_us/ssc/003066/index\\_0003066.html.en](http://www.loicz.org/about_us/ssc/003066/index_0003066.html.en)

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